

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 000560

SIPDIS

NSC FOR CBARTON
USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD
STATE PASS USAID FOR DCHA/OTI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: DAS DESHAZO PRESSES SIGNATURE COUNT WITH VP RANGEL

Classified By: Abelardo A. Arias, Political Counselor,
for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) WHA DAS Peter DeShazo told Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel on February 16 that the world is watching the manner in which the National Electoral Council(CNE) carries out the signature count on the recall petition against President Hugo Chavez. DAS DeShazo expressed full support for the work of the OAS and Carter Center in providing international observation of the signature verification process. He urged the GOV to give precedence to the will of the citizens over technicalities in the verification process. VP Rangel countered that the USG is trying to place the opinion of the OAS and Carter Center over the decision of the CNE, which has sovereign authority in the matter. He challenged the USG to declare its willingness to respect the CNE's decision regardless of the outcomes. DeShazo reiterated several times that the process must be transparent, fair, and respectful of citizens who signed in good faith. Individual press statements by both DeShazo and Rangel after the meeting echoed the same sentiments. End Summary.

DAS DeShazo Supports OAS and Carter Center

2. (C) WHA DAS Peter DeShazo, accompanied by the Ambassador, met with Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel on February 16. New Foreign Minister Jesus Perez, MFA Chief of Staff Arevalo Mendez, North American Deskoff Rebeca Guevara, and poloff (notetaker) also attended. DAS DeShazo started by expressing the USG's full support for the work of the OAS and Carter Center in the signature verification process, especially of the statement issued by the two institutions on February 13 (ref). DeShazo said the USG is concerned that the National Electoral Council CNE) is apparently raising excessive technicalities in the signature verification process in the various recall drives, including against President Hugo Chavez. DAS DeShazo expressed concern that these technical issues are being given prevalence over the will of citizens who signed the petition against Chavez in good faith. DeShazo said the USG values very much the opinion of the OAS and Carter Center in the process.

JVR: Don't Discount CNE's Sovereign Authority

3. (C) Rangel responded that the OAS and Carter Center are invited as observers by the CNE, the only entity that can call the referendum. Rangel repeatedly tried to trap DAS DeShazo into saying that the OAS and Carter Center were "above" the CNE. DeShazo replied each time that we support the OAS and Carter Center observation effort. Rangel accused the USG of attempting to supplant the OAS and Carter Center over the CNE. He said the GOV will respect the decision of the CNE no matter what (though he noted that both the GOV and the opposition would have the right to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court). He challenged the USG to commit to respect the decision of the CNE, suggesting that the USG would not respect a decision that favored President Chavez. Rangel said the "will of the people" is respected in Venezuela better than any other country because its constitution permits the recall of elected officials. Rangel objected to labelling as "technicalities" serious problems like signatures by the deceased, signatures by foreigners, and multiple signatures by the same person. Rangel noted that the signature forms presented by GOV supporters against opposition deputies contained many errors as well.

Means Just As Important As the Ends

4. (C) DAS DeShazo assured Rangel the USG respected the

sovereignty of Venezuela and the authority of the CNE, however, he noted that transparency in the process is crucial, something that can only be helped by OAS and Carter Center participation. These institutions have raised the existence of problems, such as the treatment of the "planillas planas" (signature forms in which required information was filled out by one person and then signed by individual signatories). Declining to answer Rangel's demand that the USG commit to respect the final CNE decision, DeShazo insisted several times that the manner in which the decision is carried out is just as critical. It must be transparent and fair and give precedence to the will of the citizens, he told the Vice President. The USG and the rest of the world would draw its conclusions based on these criteria, DeShazo concluded.

Press Statements Trade Shots

15. (U) Speaking to press after the meeting, DAS DeShazo reiterated USG support for the OAS and Carter Center, noting that their presence facilitated a peaceful, constitutional, democratic and legal solution in accordance with OAS Resolution 833. He backed up the observers' joint statement of February 13, highlighting the need to favor popular expression over excessive technicalities. In response to a question, DAS DeShazo recognized that the CNE will make the decision, but that it should do so free of political pressure. Asked about recent charges by President Chavez that the USG is funding allegedly seditious NGOs via the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), DeShazo pointed out that the NED's work has an established track record for supporting democracy worldwide and is open to a wide range of political actors. Both sides in Venezuela have received funding, DeShazo noted.

16. (U) VP Rangel, after meeting with DeShazo, told reporters he welcomed OAS and Carter Center participation. He said they would widen international observation to include other groups that observed the signature drives. He also warned the USG to refrain from casting the OAS and Carter Center as a parallel mechanism to the sovereign authority of the CNE. Rangel said he had asked DeShazo what the USG response would be if the CNE rejected the presidential recall petition and said he got no response. He then added that he did not care what the USG thinks since the matter is exclusively Venezuelan. Rangel renewed Chavez's accusations that the USG is funding the opposition, suggesting that those groups who took money might be guilty of violating a Supreme Court decision from 2001.

Comment

17. (C) Rangel was contentious throughout the meeting and repeatedly tried to bait DAS DeShazo into committing to the CNE's final decision. He was in lockstep with the Chavista line that the international community seeks to subordinate the CNE to international observers. The GOV is obviously disturbed by the OAS/Carter Center statement of February 13 and has begun a smear campaign to discredit them. The GOV is clearly positioning itself to deny the referendum, and to neutralize the moral authority of the international observers.

18. (U) DAS DeShazo cleared this cable.
SHAPIRO

NNNN

2004CARACA00560 - CONFIDENTIAL